

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Fleas, Livestock And Amole**

Fleas, livestock and a taste of amole (soap root) were so thoroughly impressed upon the mind of a pioneer of 1848, that he wrote to the Monterey Cypress in February of 1907 relating his experiences during his stay in Monterey in that year. The clipping was found by Mrs. Millie Birks among her fund of historical items and given to the Monterey History and Art Assn. that old-timers and newcomers might enjoy it. The report was probably written by Jack Swan, the builder of the First Theater who always called himself the "Pioneer of 1848."

The pioneer relates that he had read an article about historic Monterey by Edward A. Sherman about the First Brick House that was built by G. D. Dickenson in 1847 and these articles inspired him to add a bit to the story.

He said that he received his discharge from the sloop-of-war Lexington, at Monterey in March 1848. The First Brick House, now the home of Mrs. Juan Garcia on Decatur street, was the first house that he lived in after coming ashore from the ship. He went to work for Mr. Dickenson for \$1 per day.

On his first day of work, the pioneer reported, Mr. Dickenson sent him out to pasture two yoke of wild steers that he wanted to break in for oxen. He let the steers out of the yard, and they went out on the jump, around by the beach. Their caretaker did not have a horse and he had to run to keep the oxen in sight. The steers kept on running, first one way and then another and it was somewhere about where Pacific Grove is now that he got ahead of the animals and turned them back toward Monterey. It was 3 p.m., he reported, before he got them back into the yard.

It was then that he told Mr. Dickenson that he would have to find someone more familiar with animals than he was to take care of them. A Spanish man who had a horse was hired.

The next day he was sent up the Carmel Valley with Mr. Dickenson's oldest son, Edward Dickenson, after a load of wild oat hay that, the boys had cut.

The brick house was full of fleas, writes the correspondent, who called himself The Pioneer, and as he had on his "man of war" clothes and the shirt was all wool, he got full of fleas. As they were going up the

Carmel Hill, he reported, he told his companion that the fleas were eating him up and he took off his shirt to hunt for them. It was literally covered with the tiny black animals. As they were in the wool, he had no trouble killing them between the thumb nails. "I remember well the number that I killed and that was 72," he wrote. "After the killing my shirt looked like Joseph's coat of many colors."

"We went on and got our load of hay. Coming up from the Carmel Valley I found an amole soap root that was used in those days in the place of soap. I asked Ed what it was, and he told me that it was Spanish onion," wrote The Pioneer. "I asked Ed if it was good to eat and he replied, 'Of course it is.' I took out my knife and cut a piece off and put it into my mouth and started to chew it. I commenced to froth at the mouth and I hurriedly spat out the 'Spanish onion' and with it enough soap to wash a dozen shirts. Ed laughed so hard that he was just rolling over the hay and not looking to see where the oxen were going. The wagon ran over a big pine log and upset, and I had to forget about spitting soap so as to get Ed out from under the hay. Ed was not hurt, and we loaded up the hay and got home in good condition."

So ended the memoirs of a Monterey Pioneer of 1848.